

## **Walkability in Indian Country**

My name is Pamela Journey, and I have been involved with tribal transportation since 2007. Having traveled the United States visiting various tribal nations and reservations, I have discovered that each Tribe's situation is unique based on its geography, topography, tribal lands, housing, administration, and health and community services. My travels have taken me to tribes in the eastern and northeastern United States, the northwest, the southwest, Kansas, and of course, Oklahoma. Many of these visits to tribal nations were for the purpose of developing transportation safety plans. The site visits included tours of the reservation and meetings to discuss what is important to the tribal members and their community.

No matter the size of the reservation, or the tribal membership, the one thing that is common throughout Indian Country is people walking. Whether for recreation, children walking to and from a school bus or the youth center, the elderly walking to tribal services and activity centers, family members walking in their neighborhood, or employees walking to work, people are walking through tribal lands. Therefore, walkability, providing safe and convenient pedestrian pathways, where the natural environment and cultural values are interwoven into a network that highlights and enhances the tribal community and heritage, is paramount for tribal transportation.

## **What is Indian Country?**

First, let's take a moment to define what is meant by "Indian Country." I reference the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) for guidance. The term "Indian Country" is leveraged broadly as a general description of Native spaces and places within the United States, and it is inclusive of the hundreds of tribal nations that occupy these spaces.

Below is a map showing Indian Country across the continent. These layer sources are from the BIA & the U.S. Census Bureau. As we know, these are technocratic boundaries. Indian Country is more than what can be delineated on a map. It is the sacred places and spaces of people and communities.

## **What is Walkability?**

In the introduction, Ian told us about the America Walks organization. To reiterate, America Walks advances walkable, equitable, connected, and accessible places in EVERY community.

Over the pandemic, we have seen the importance of walking in our personal lives. If we were meeting in person, we would take a moment to share how our walking behaviors changed because of COVID. Our group here today completed a survey to answer what walkability means to each one of us. Let's take a look at the results of that survey. [SURVEY](#)

A word cloud has been generated based on everyone's responses.

## **Why Movement Matters**

Why does walkability matter? Why does movement matter?

We are all aware of the health disparities of American Indians / Alaska Natives. The CDC states that, “AI/AN culture and traditions have been severely disrupted by colonialism, loss of land, and policies, such as assimilation, relocation, and tribal termination, resulting in historical trauma, contributing to higher rates of chronic disease and underlying risk factors, such as obesity and commercial tobacco use.” American Indian and Alaska Natives continue to die at higher rates than other Americans in diabetes, chronic kidney disease, and chronic respiratory diseases.

This next series of maps paints a picture of physical health across the U.S. by counties. There is distinct overlap of crisis counties with tribal lands.

## **Is walking worth the effort?**

In addition to physical health, walking is crucial to mental, intellectual, social, and spiritual health. The first America Walks webinar that I attended was the presentation of this book, *In Praise of Walking*, by the neuroscientist Shane O’Mara. One of the things the author brings to light is how much we have lost by not walking. The notion that struck me was the importance of inadvertent touch that takes places when we walk together, how this connects us in subtle and subconscious ways. He also discusses how walking generates blood flow that stimulates brain cells. Walking can actually make us smarter. Walking gives us time to pause and process – a kind of moving meditation that replenishes our spirits.

If it’s not enough to believe the neuroscientist, NBC’s Today published an article in February of this year to answer this question. Is walking worth the effort? The answer is YES.

## **Walking in Indian Country**

This next section is a virtual map tour that “walks” us through various paths and pedestrian situations of tribal communities across the country. These are all places I’ve visited, where I’ve seen pathways done well, where pathways need to be improved, and where pathways need to be built.

1. We will begin our journey at the Olympic Discovery Trail. The ODT stretches for 130 miles across the peninsula of Washington state. The photos you see here are from the Jamestown S’Klallam section of the trail.
2. The views are stunning along the trail
3. This photo was taken looking out from Jamestown S’Klallam tribal complex
4. Now we travel to the Puget Sound to the Port Gamble S’Klallam tribe in Kingston, Washington – Kitsap County). This area sees a lot of bicycle & pedestrian traffic. This photo is the entrance to the reservation – Little Boston Road.
5. This is a bus shelter at intersection Little Boston Road & a tribal housing area

6. Here at the tribal complex, we visit graveyard corner. Named as such for the cemetery that lies adjacent to the roadway. Notice the pedestrian sign, the car & sharp corner, all right at the tribal complex.
7. The next two photos are taken in Lapwai, Idaho, headquarters of the Nez Perce Tribe. The two photos are taken from the same spot, looking both directions toward the tribal complex and toward the school.
8. Nez Perce Tribe – Lapwai High School
9. These next photos show distinctive walking challenges on the Duck Valley Reservation (in Nevada & Idaho). The first is a pedestrian crossing at the Owyhee combined school. The state highway runs alongside of it.
10. The next shows a familiar sign in rural areas: a school bus warning sign. This bus route is on the reservation that feeds the Owyhee school. Yet, where is there room for children to walk safely? Rural walkability is gaining notice and tribes have the unique opportunity to plan for and lead the endeavor.
11. This next photo is Albuquerque is where the BIA is headquartered. This walking trail connects the UNM with the larger city. Walking paths can be built in congested, urban areas. Why can't we build walking paths in rural, open areas where we have the space and where people need to be protected from high speed traffic?
12. Next we travel to Oklahoma. Here we see two different types of walking paths within a few hundred feet of each other. The Citizen Potawatomi Nation built this walking trail around its geothermal pond. It's located next to the ballfields, powwow grounds, and tribal offices. It provides recreation and connectivity within its tribal lands.
13. In contrast, this sidewalk safety project was one of the first projects funded by the TTP safety funds. This path provides safe pedestrian passage between the town of Shawnee and the CPN tribal complex.
14. In northern Oklahoma, the Pawnee Nation built this 1 mile walking trail that connects its health center and powwow grounds. This path provides a natural sanctuary and opportunities for physical exercise.
15. This is one of my favorites: the Prairie Band Potawatomi Nation in Kansas has built a walking trail that winds through the Prairie Peoples Park and travels a couple of miles to tribal housing and emergency services. If we zoom out, you can track the path. If we zoom in, you can see the park details. The park holds their powwow grounds, has a buffalo viewing platform, and is the site of tribal artifacts. The entrance was designed by a tribal member and local artist.
16. Now we jump across the country to New York State. Here we will observe a situation that is a recurring problem: a highway cutting through a tribal community. Several years ago, the Seneca

Nation hosted a FHWA workshop. To ground-truth the area, we actually walked from the hotel under the highway, crossed the roadways to the tribal complex, and then walked along the Allegheny River. Like all tribes, in addition to safety, walkability also means preservation and appreciation of the natural environment, especially as it ties to the tribe's cultural values.

17. Last is the Mohegan Tribe of Connecticut. This is an interesting mix of commercial and tribal culture and land management. The photo here was taken from the tribal complex looking out toward the Mohegan Sun. The Mohegan Sun often hosts big venue events (think NBA hall of fame induction), yet the tribe is also committed to preserving its cultural heritage and providing for its tribal members.
18. The pedestrian activity varies from the tourism of the Mohegan Sun to the business traffic at the tribal complex to the recreation traffic at the Fort Shantok State Park, a national historic landmark. Fort Shantok was the site of the principal Mohegan settlement between 1636 and 1682 and the sacred ground of Uncas, one of the most prominent and influential Mohegan leaders and statesmen of his era. Originally part of Mohegan reservation lands, the property was taken by the state of Connecticut in the 20th century and Fort Shantok State Park was established. In 1995, following legal action by the tribe to recover its lands, the state returned the park to Mohegan control. The tribe now operates the area, part of its reservation, as a local park.

### **How to Improve Walkability?**

We have to consider the reasons why people don't walk. Then, we must design communities that support walking.

Here are some resources and programs to encourage walking. The Surgeon General of the U.S. has recently produced this report. When this story map is made available, you will be able to access all the resources by clicking on the links.

I would also like to introduce this group called Running Medicine (RM). RM is a running movement program focused on tribal communities. RM is based in Albuquerque. You can click on the link or I can provide more information for anyone interested.

In recognition of October as Pedestrian Safety Month, Cross Timbers Consulting is hosting a walking challenge. Registration is free, and we are encouraging everyone to walk at least 1 mile for every working day during the month = 21 miles in 10-21. If you click on the information icon, it will take you to the link to register. We have set up an app where participants can submit their miles or time online.

### **Walking and the Tribal Transportation Program**

The purpose of this conference is to focus on tribal transportation. The Tribal Transportation Program was established in 2012 to replace the Indian Reservation Roads Program. When the TTP was established, the use of funds was to provide for pedestrians and bicycles. However, it has been my experience that the TTP has followed the course of the transportation industry and focused on designing

roadways. Transportation is all-encompassing. Over the last few years, we have seen the National Tribal Transportation Facility Inventory evolve to include more and more transportation facilities. More attention is needed to plan for walkability within our tribal transportation networks.

Let's look at a few examples to see how we can better plan for walking infrastructure.

This was mentioned earlier, but how many tribal communities are transected by highways? The Wyandotte Nation has their wellness and youth center south of the highway, and their tribal complex and housing area north of the highway. As we know, tribes often work with limited and fractured land parcels. Pedestrian infrastructure is paramount in tribal communities.

How can we maximize land use to best serve tribal communities? This half-mile walking trail is one of several built through a partnership of a Muscogee Nation community health program and the tribal transportation program. Funded with TTP dollars, the construction of the MVTO walking trail was a collaborative project between the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, the City of Eufaula, the BIA, and the US Army Corps of Engineers.

Lastly, the Okemah pedestrian bridge was a collaboration between the Muscogee Nation, the City of Okemah, and the Oklahoma Department of Transportation. The purpose of this project was to protect school children who were walking from a tribal housing complex, down through a ditch, across a state highway, and up a hill to school. The Muscogee Nation funded the design and installation of a pedestrian bridge, and ODOT installed the crosswalk.

In conclusion, our tribal transportation program efforts have been remiss in planning for pedestrian infrastructure. The dedicated efforts to roadway safety are good, but they are reactive. Crash data can only be collected if a crash occurs.

Planning for walkability, for roadway sharing, for preemptive measures is proactive. Walkability means access for all, connectivity, and safety. As we move forward with tribal transportation planning, we need to focus on the most basic mode of transportation: walking.

## **From 25 CFR Part 170**

*Tribal transportation facility* means a public highway, road, bridge, trail, transit system, or other approved facility that is located on or provides access to Tribal land and appears on the NTTFI described in 23 U.S.C. 202(b)(1).

### **§ 170.123 Can a Tribe use Federal funds for its recreation, tourism, and trails program?**

Yes. A Tribe, Consortium, or the BIA may use TTP funds for recreation, tourism, and trails programs if the programs are included in the TTPTIP. Additionally, the following Federal programs may be possible sources of Federal funding for recreation, tourism, and trails projects and activities:

- (a) Federal Lands Access Program (23 U.S.C. 204);
- (b) National Highway Performance Program (23 U.S.C. 119);
- (c) Transportation Alternatives (23 U.S.C. 213);
- (d) Surface Transportation Program (23 U.S.C. 133);
- (e) Other funding from other Federal departments; and
- (f) Other funding that Congress may authorize and appropriate.

### **§ 170.124 How can a Tribe obtain funds?**

- (a) To receive funding for programs that serve recreation, tourism, and trails goals, a Tribe should:
  - (1) Identify a program meeting the eligibility guidelines for the funds and have it ready for development; and
  - (2) Have a viable project ready for improvement or construction, including necessary permits.
- (b) Tribes seeking to obtain funding from a State under the programs identified in § 170.123(b) through (f) should contact the State directly to determine eligibility, contracting opportunities, funding mechanisms, and project administration requirements. These funds would be made available as provided by § 170.627 of this part.
- (c) In order to expend any Federal transportation funds, a Tribe must ensure that the eligible project/program is listed on an FHWA-approved TIP or STIP.

### **§ 170.125 What types of activities can a recreation, tourism, and trails program include?**

- (a) The following are examples of activities that Tribes and Consortia may include in a recreation, tourism, and trails program:
  - (1) Transportation planning for tourism and recreation travel;
  - (2) Adjacent public vehicle parking areas;
  - (3) Development of tourist information and interpretative signs;
  - (4) Provision for non-motorized trail activities including pedestrians and bicycles;
  - (5) Provision for motorized trail activities including all-terrain vehicles, motorcycles, snowmobiles, etc.;
  - (6) Construction improvements that enhance and promote safe travel on trails;
  - (7) Safety and educational activities;
  - (8) Maintenance and restoration of existing recreational trails;
  - (9) Development and rehabilitation of trailside and trailhead facilities and trail linkage for recreational trails;
  - (10) Purchase and lease of recreational trail construction and maintenance equipment;
  - (11) Safety considerations for trail intersections;
  - (12) Landscaping and scenic enhancement (see 23 U.S.C. 319);
  - (13) Bicycle transportation and pedestrian walkways (see 23 U.S.C. 217); and
  - (14) Trail access roads.
- (b) The items listed in paragraph (a) of this section are not the only activities that are eligible for recreation, tourism, and trails funding. The funding criteria may vary with the specific requirements of the programs.